

News Release



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Cathy Taylor
324-7815

Contact: Steve Capps
(916) 651-8750

CORRECTED PRESS RELEASE:

Please note: Dropping reference to maintenance personnel (in 5th paragraph.)

Railtown Excursion Trains Face Possible Cancellation

JAMESTOWN, Tuolumne County – Popular weekend excursion steam train trips offered by California State Parks at its Railtown 1897 State Historic Park may be canceled as soon as this coming weekend because of a dispute over track maintenance, California State Parks officials announced today.

State Parks is asking visitors to call ahead to confirm whether or not the Park's authentic steam-powered, weekend excursion train rides are operating. Railtown's phone number is (209) 984-3953.

The Park offers a number of other popular activities besides the excursions, including daily tours of the Historic Sierra Railroad Shops and Roundhouse complex, interpretive center and gift shop, and picnic facilities. The roundhouse and shops complex is one of the last of its kind in America. Built in the final years of the 19th century, it remains in operation today for the maintenance and repair of historic steam locomotives and passenger and freight cars preserved at the Park.

Railtown 1897 State Historic Park and the historic trains preserved there have starred in over 200 feature films, television shows, and commercials. Among the Park's more famous appearances are those in the epic 1950s western *High Noon*, Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, *Back to the Future III* with Michael J. Fox, "Death Valley Days," *Tales of Wells Fargo*, and "Petticoat Junction."

California State Parks has a permanent right-of-way over a six-mile section of track between Jamestown and Chinese Station (which is also used by Sierra Railroad freight trains), but has been unable to reach agreement with the owner of the track, the Sierra Railroad Company, over maintenance projects.

Sierra Railroad has threatened to downgrade the passenger safety rating of its track, which would prevent operation of State Parks' excursion trains under applicable federal law. The weekend steam train excursions are a popular feature of the Park – about 30,000 people ride them during a summer season.

"It is a shame that we have been unable to reach agreement with the Sierra Railroad on track maintenance issues," said Cathy Taylor, Museum Director of the California State Railroad Museum,

which oversees operations of Railtown 1897 SHP from its Sacramento headquarters. “Without resolution, we may be forced to cancel the excursion trains as early as this weekend.”

Traditionally, Railtown 1897 State Historic Park has offered steam train excursions through the Sierra foothill Gold Country every weekend, April through October. Trains depart on the hour, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Trains also run on Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day. A number of special “themed” trains, including Spring Wildflower Special trains, Wine & Cheese Specials, Twilight Specials, Halloween and Santa trains, and even a New Year’s Eve Train operate throughout the year.

Located in Jamestown, three miles south of Sonora in Tuolumne County, Railtown 1897 State Historic Park is the place where the original Sierra Railway Company began its short-line operation in 1897. The line’s steam locomotives were replaced by diesel engines in the 1950s, but Hollywood discovered the historic locomotives and cars stored in the Jamestown Shops and Roundhouse complex, helping to ensure their continued existence.

Change came to the Sierra Railroad in 1979. The Crocker family, longtime controlling owners of the line, announced the intention to sell its interests. In a complex deal, the railroad was sold to a group of investors based in Chicago. The Jamestown roundhouse and shops complex—along with the historic locomotives and cars used for movies and excursions—was not included in the sale of the railroad. Instead it was transferred to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, becoming Railtown 1897 State Historic Park in 1982 and opening to the public the following year.

The present-day Sierra Railroad was sold to its current owner about 20 years ago, shortly after Railtown 1897’s transfer to California State Parks.

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